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Typography by Seán Jennett

EDITORIAL

There is little doubt that the present collapse of anything like normal economic relationship between the countries of the world and the parcelling out of the battered remains of civilization into small mediæval territories separated by exceedingly efficient iron curtains is going to have a considerable effect on the literature of our time. And the rapidly deteriorating position of the serious writer, who often enough is a poet, will be another factor in determining the kind of book which will be found in the bookshops of the future. Earlier in the century poetry was moving towards an international idiom. To-day it is difficult not to realize how far away in spirit is the work being done say in America and in England, and how far out of touch the two communities are though the language is the same. In France, too, how far away are we from the days when French poetry created a new world for every young writer of whatever nationality. It is hard to say at this slack water period, too soon before the turning of the tide, how the waters will flow. In England there is less doubt, I think, that we shall be turning from the obscurities of verse heavily charged with associations hard for the reader to unravel to a greater simplicity of language with an imagery perhaps more evocative of the realities of sea and country rather than the horrors of city pavements that may fade away into the silence of disaster. This may not prevent poetry from being rich as well with the symbol risen from the unconscious like a ghost walking in an old house. The necessary third part ingredient of dream and the strange flash of something from a world of shadows which is the greater reality of all men and women is still likely to keep the odd cinderella poetry, more loved in this country perhaps than any other, still with us for another thousand years.

In this issue we attempt to give a fairly wide picture of the poetry that is being written in the English language all over the world. A. E. Hansen sends his poem from Australia, Kendrick Smithyman from New Zealand. Earle Birney teaches in the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, and edits the Canadian Poetry Magazine. Miss Edith Sitwell is of the opinion that José Garcia Villa is one of the most interesting poets writing in America, and Coleman Rosenberger concludes his Selection of Recent American Poetry.

ALEX COMFORT

Andromache

Andromache who once was married, given
in servitude, her stature and her face
shrunken by recollection, lies at night

thinking of walls and ships. Another time
the candle pattern shows her faces—now
the days like grains of sand silt features up

and he who is dead and all the rest who died
are worn away like coins or monuments
thinner and featureless. They go that way

to an unressurected vagueness with
their voices or their ways—unreachable darkness
covers their faces. Nothing is left to hold

but a white oval moving into time

Prisoners and widows know it, children know,
Now has no meaning, only Then and Coming.
The child that changes between Sunday and Sunday

in the dark room of times and distances
the echoes of their faces cease as fast
as steps on beaches fill when we look back

or the wax flow of faces into age
then into names—of her young self whose face
no one knows now and she herself has forgotten

Hector and she, two names, faceless in time
a prisoners' bed, or footsteps coming, and
days set alike like soldiers, one behind the other

where memory's unequal melting leaves

the hardest things behind. A hanging coat,
a cough, a finger, fossils. And all time
level as water running slowly out.

JOHN HEATH-STUBBS

Tannhäuser's End

Tannhäuser heard, but did not understand,
That Latin commination; but he saw
The old man's face, wrinkled and papery-white
Like a cast snake-skin on a bank of flowers,
His silver hairs the frost congealing round
A budded bough. The Pope's hieratic hand
Stood like a branching candle-stick to Heaven,
The bare arm thrust from crimson gold-embroidered
Robes that hung, stiff as though carved in stone,
About his spare but unbent form. Above him rose
The domed basilica, where from the walls,
With flat gold aureoles behind their heads,
Gazed down the ranks on ranks of virgins,
Implacable, with oval, staring eyes; and over the altar
The seven Archangels, planetary spirits,
Seemed to advance, and drew their flaming swords.

Trembling, the pilgrim wrapped his cloak around him,
Descending down and down the marble stair
Between the hooded figures, and went out
Onto the long white roads. And so he passed
Forever from their ken.

He had gone back
To find the secret and enduring forest.
But it was winter now: his upcast eye
Sought there in vain the bright-necked dove, the messenger
Of that soft-breasted goddess whom he loved.
Only the prying magpie from the fir
Would watch him passing with a curious eye; or in the snow
The loping mountain hare that sought those woods
To cram her maw with birch-bark, halted, at gaze.
None knows how many days Tannhäuser wandered on,
Still with the carved harp slung upon his back,
Among whose strings only the bitter wind
Wakened a prelude now—ghost of a song
Sung to gay-mantled ladies in high bower,
While the white lilac fluttered at the window;
What woodland paths he took, at what cold streams

He knelt and drank, or sought with frozen hand
Among the branches of the mountain-ash
Those few bright berries which the redwing left.
And none can tell if on some bank of snow
At last he fell, exhausted,
And if it was in dreams the dying man
Was led again into the lighted hall
Of the wise fairy he had honoured once,
A boy, beneath the May-day hawthorn tree:
Fru Frekë, the good housewife,
Inventor of the small blue-flowering flax-plant,
Rewarding the industrious servant-girls
With showers of gold; who rides by summer nights
On wild grey geese about a rounding moon
With her bright waiting women (she claims as such
All those who die unmarried.)
Or yet perhaps no lonely woodcutter
Found late his frozen body (which the wolf
Spared) in the woods. For he had come at last
Into the echoing cave beneath the mountain;
And well-known hands had drawn him down
Into the ancient centre of the world,
The mothering-place beneath the vaulted earth,
Her cool death-kingdom. 'Rest now, sleep
O Lover, o child.'. . .

But upon Lateran the steady chanting
Suddenly stopped, as a great invisible angel
Were passing over them;
While in the old man's grasp his withered rod
Broke all at once into green leaves and petals;
And wandered then about those stony cells
Through motionless faint air
The unexpected holy scent of roses.

W. S. GRAHAM

The Bright Midnight

Beside this church underneath a saintly element
Once rested in my arms another midnight more
Miracled into early years and maze of pathways
Frosted between the grasses of the churchyard.
Once rested on the flying spire earlier eyes
In appearance likely mine but far and elsewhere
Gazing from. Under this midnight, beside this church
What greyhaired measures and infant measures advance
Between the stones and audience the time contains?

Allow for some answer this winter night, the children
Who live in five worshipping stone houses not far
Arranged under those stars, to reply towards me
Some evidence out of an early innocence of sleep.
The winter strikes bright on Christ's walls and glass
Stained into saints and lanterned all disciples
Acting the bible ghosts gone wild into fire
At blind dust. I'll be for a struck silence
Fixed as the bell strikes the midnight dead still.

Served with a breath to breath rarely away.
Beside his death the infant sleeps, which always
Wears generously his journey with a wise fear.
And he sleeps, particle teemed with stars under
Rafter and stone and family light. He sleeps
So always lost to the candle. Or even there
With slow moon on the sill peering him out
Of sleep, he's wandered out that bitter light
Learning his young shade's new lightnings and burials.

There where his head rests on my mind made white
Under wind and riding brilliance of black winter
Bushed into burning skies, his taken breath
Breaks on the night held doors keeping my best
Wishes kneeling towards the manger of his word.
Take hand then in the heed of my head's world
By winter roadside pitched under the breasting
Grave-staring moon. Take care. Take careful breath
Out of this scalding freeze in the diamond midnight.

There with his step take step along the nightway
Chained into white under the snowfalling owl
And spoken bell. Taken by the blinding hand
Over the pillow hill calling him to heroes
He, full of his enemies many as his heavenly seconds
Chimed off to ambitious dust, comes to his snows.
Comparison raising the powders of a pure light.
The clock knocks on the wall. The boy sleeps all
Gathered in a good breast from the blazing frost.

Now wordawake here bowed under the armoured heavens
Bright over the dead stones, I ring the iron road
Cast dazzling before me hearing the striking winter
Through the moor's dykes. The spire across the signs
Flies burning in a saintly breath. I am near neighbour
Always to the gravestoned head and head covered
With still early angels in the all alone one world whole.
I ring my footsteps under my eyes closed, burning
In my white fires and words in the brain's black branches.

HARRY ROSKOLENKO

Japanese Portrait

Black is the city and the truth of the Heart,
Black as the ground and the rubble of towns,
As brown as the mountains that round and round
Are soft and cold and wet and in the snow.

Laugh for all the little ancient laughters
Still weeping round the small, small faces.
Into the narrow canes of streets that madly weep,
The children hobble or sadly, slowly creep.

Cry! for their innocence is like all others
Who wait for emperors to crown their loneliness.
And if thorns are angels and roses are devils,
The children do not know and they are young.

Little, small, humble, like the white of snow,
They shout 'Hello!' As if Americans were birds;
Not hawks or crows or dragons, but a thing, winged,
Waiting to fly or perhaps to only sing.

TESSA SILLARS

Convent Chapel

They disciplined our knees;
We, in the quiet morning,
In the extinguished smell of candles,
Kneeling with new-washed ears
Disregardful of the priestly solo,
Attentive to the elsewhere world
That beat a branch against the altar window.

They bowed our heads in similar white veils,
Scrupulously hostile to our separate identities:
Coupling the incomprehensible with the level
Incontestible:
Nourishing excess with moderate abstinence.

They joined our hands and called it the Communion
of Saints,
Shaping our indifferent fingers
Round the lily stalk and candle.
(Its waxen flesh adhering to
Our sensitive, uncomprehending palms.)

Bent knees, veiled heads, and modest hands,
All these are apt and purposeful
Towards a governed growth,
Too swiftly shaping premature finality,
Killing the potentiality that lies
In tilted angles and living contradiction.

IAIN FLETCHER

Chorus from a Not-to-be-written Drama

My pen is splintered in the minute's waste.
My sleeve-hung heart grotesquely magnified.
Emblems of thought, view, touch and taste
Seduce me in a wardrobe filled with pride.
    What I would do I do not, doing
    All that I hate. Pursued, myself pursuing.

Hunting myself in others, hunting what
Never existed to be quarry or admired.
In the final sense the sexless phantom not
That warmth and tenseness others have desired.
    Gifts never nourished by my cruel arts;
    Completeness captivated in its parts.

But these all breathe out 'nothing,' are
Heavily unreal, a drugged metaphysician
Who knows the junction of retina and star
In some fixed locus which is not position,
    But cannot find that soft duality
    Of mind and flesh the heart should magnify.

My life is after Fall and Flood and Passion,
When sensitive hearts hide in their irony,
When the dead cosmos in a formal fashion
Translates my grievings into vanity.
    My life is after unity, and wanders still
    In penitential valleys of the will.

My life is after action, after lust,
After the mitigations of the faith,
After the nostrils solicited by dust;
My life is in the diocese of wraith.
    My life is after wrath, being so unreal
    There are no heaven-comings to conceal;

Nor the severities of beauty nor
The mind-enchanting aspects of a face,
The moral charm that all too many wore
So pertinently confident of grace;
    My life is after space, and time, and will;
    My life is always moved, but always still.

None moves me but my weakness, weak
Beyond all judgment and beyond all law,
Transversing voids my witnesses shall speak,
Tethered in graves, watchmen who never saw.
    But in their pride of eyes they gave
    Me mandate to believe their sighs could save.

ERNST SIGLER

For Bosola's Dying

Now as you spoke an answer was prepared
by voices rowed across the easy water
to overawe with each succeeding letter
the island hollow where you saw and heard,
lying, a bridge to span your single chord
and bear the music of your deeds' begetters
tuned on your far-stretched body, the psalter
sung in a mockery of death, your single word.

This: even if you had long contemplated,
gathered upon the engulfing island,
how blood and sinew taut had learned
hatred of the convex hills you spurned,
to know the song, the fresh white page these found
whom you had thought to end, who always waited.

JAMES KIRKUP

The Travelling Companion

The locomotive spanned the rivers with a bridge of lighted glass, or
in cities'
star-pierced domes, at quays of fog, berthed like a landfall liner.
In the darkened compartment, behind drawn blinds that furnaces
rimmed now with fire, and the overflowing lakes
of swinging arc-lamps inundated now and drenched
with shaking cataracts of day, red wastes of blinding dark,
the floor rocked like a cabin's as the ship, half-foundering,
ground out its iron wake upon a sea of stones.

I can not recall when, in the sounding deep
of tunnels, or in the ground-swell of plains
rising to mountainous heights, I first became
the form that had the features of another
who was not, and yet who was, myself.
I saw him gazing at me through the sliding doors;
then he entered, and without a word
lay down upon the other seat, and slept.

All night I watched him sleep
behind that well-remembered mask;
and when, to re-assure myself,
I touched the distance of my own forgotten face,
he, too, as in a dream, explored the skull
beneath his other smile. I felt that touch,
so loving, so remote, so blind:
and yet I knew that it was only mine.

Here, had I at last, discovered that long-lost identity
that I had sought for vainly in my mirrored loneliness?
Though his eyes were always closed,
my own seemed open, for I saw
how, underneath those dreaming lids
the pupils still seemed to observe,
and even with an added sharpness
seemed to glitter through their coverings.

'Brother, do not remember me, for I am dead.'
For I am dead! I heard my own voice speak those words,
and watched my own dead body borne away by guards
down endless, swaying, empty corridors.
Outside, the wind's intermittent fountains
played in the country trees' white-wired dawn.
O, was it he, or I, who spoke, and then was gone?
O is it he, or I, who now remain?

In the green fields, where running horses mingling foam-bright manes
careered, but did not seem to move beside the steam's cloud-leaping chargers,
it was no longer night. But in the darkened carriage
still I lay, and saw, imprisoned in an empty train,
these visions of myself: two mirrors face to face, reflecting endlessly
reflection's endless mirror, and the obscure upholstery's
dead, interlocking pattern, repeated in the loneliness
of each lonelier compartment . . . an interminable figure, wondering

if he can ever recognize again the solid and the true,
if I am really I, and you were ever really you.

IRIS BIRTWISTLE

Distant Friends

Up shot their arms, scorched stalks with
Wind the puppet master. Their
Automatic eyes below
The level of the waiting
Worm gave forth no sudden glint
Of welcome, but a thin wind
Lifted each shrivelled blade and
Waved the vacant hands, splayed like
Starfish on a totem pole.

DENISE LEVERTOFF

A Dream of Cornwall

Footprint of fury quiet, now, on the salt sand
hills couched like hares in blue grass of the air
water lifting its glass to star and candle
time curled at rest in a ready hand.

No claw of wind plucking the strings of the sea
never a bough bent, no sad fruit falling;
never a rage of autumn's angry angel
but sails in to the haven of a tree.

O fear dissolves here and now I cease
to hear the hammer the axe the bone the bell,
shade of a shade grown still, grief of a grief
lulled in green hollows of a well of peace.

TOM SCOTT

Reverie

Led by poverty and desire on an empty day
Along by the river with the leaning rashes, lavender,
I took in my stride the innocent knoll
To startle three nude wheatear girls from the bushes.

The air crackled with screams and victorious giggles,
Racing legs straddling the rearing grass
Carried them soon from my enchanted gaze.

For the long moment of this poem I was free and rich,
Graced with peace and still as a pointing setter;
On a bountiful day no longer led by poverty or desire.

Rondo

But in the night time to go down
down
down
down into the night of the soul
down as far as the soul can reach
and at last to come to that door
set in darkness, there
leaving the great horse pawing in shadows
fire aflame at eye and nostril
throwing care to the winds,
pass through into the known dawn,
the teeming centre of weeds and stars
and posture at the hindoo man
telling him this has come for that treasure;
or ring it from his old bones even,
take the goblet of iron and fire
the bread of earth, from his quavering hands
fill my pockets for them
then leave that rifled place
striving through angry ghouls
weary mists and strangling fogs
slay, slay the dragon, break the chains
bringing my wife on the white horse home,
the promise to reality at last.
That my sons my sons might after be
respected steel in the won valley of men.

HERBERT CORBY

El Dorado

Sheer, the rock slides downwards to the black
iron of the silent water: a melancholy
binds the ebony ripples, the sky is hollow.
Behind the mountain, twitches the nervous track
that fools and bald monks travel, and the earthquake tightens.
The fixed hills and the archway of the dark
poise in the blatant memory like death
of immense wet shadows and vertiginous walls.

Under the black serene water floats the gold
statue, as round as fable, swathed in silence
like bandages of dark: cushioned below
and above by the inviolable water.

Above, above the condor and the treasure-haunted
conquistadors, the blind rock and blind shadows!

So take your stance below the liquid levels,
gaze deeply through this night of starless water
to the vast god suspended in his heaven
of water, with his robes a cardinal glory,
armoured from time and the quiet teeth of corruption:
and upwards through the cavern to the surfaces,
magnified by water, of the peering watchers. . . .
    And behind them, know the hills and the horizon
stoned with a star, and frail leaf down the valleys,
and like a velvet, the long empty silence.

This is a thing El Greco should have painted.

CHARLES CAUSLEY

Homage to Louis MacNeice

The green plover
In the flashing heaven
Is not by doubt
Or danger driven
But like a lover
Dives to discover
The ravelled stream
Or the bubble dream.

I am the Jonah
In the iron whale
Turtle and dolphin
And drumming sail
Explosion of gulls
On the frozen gun
Only the word on the page
Says come.

O the ropes are ice
On the black canal
And the snow is burning
After the ball.
Down the Welsh Marches
The nightingales sever
The mountains like arrows
And leave them for ever.

MARY JAMIESON

Our Silken Faces

I have torn down the smiles from our silken faces,
Pierced the flash of our sparkling eyes,
Fingered the texture of close embraces,
Chipped off our porcelain masks.

O bright
Are the banners of bravery
Smiling
From silken fa

I have forced our anatomy back to our skulls,
Focused the carefree laughter of friends,
Caught on the wing the impermanent kiss,
Weighed our beginnings and ends.

O bright
Are the banners of bravery
Smiling
From silken faces.

I have touched the lean beggars who lurch in the dark,
Prostitutes drunk and clawing our hair,
Strangers loitering under the lamps,
Rain slashing our streets with despair.

O bright
Are the banners of bravery
Smiling
From silken faces.

JOHN ZADEK

Song Without Love

Why sigh at the world's turning?
Why lament
As every day the sun
Withdraws another promise?

He, who has seen
Dark pools showing
Their shallow ends, and heard
The old words of love
Turning upon a crooked tongue,
Knows
That soon
There will be no peace;
—Save in the shell
Beneath the shores,
The brittle leaf, whose silence
Shelters every eye's dark summer.

Why sigh?
See, even after the shouting men
Have buried their burning fists
And the last sensuous strand
Of light lies severed,
His cry
Shall not conceive despair
Nor thresh the silence
Like a broken beast;

His sigh
Shall hold no secrets
In its shadow-towers.

PAUL SCOTT

Poem

The dream comes in all over the place
the dream and the wind a stranger
to me in the dark. The wind is cool
but is a stranger. The *dream* I know.
After a while it is the same dream.
The same texture is in its grip
that is in my brain when I sleep
sleeping alone in the room where
wind and dreams
merge
and fill all senses
that are private, urgent
and deep down ready for
breaking like
sea in surge.

After the deluge
I dream. Amphibious dreams
cling to the raft of my senses
and fall when the grip is bare
the fingers numb
with the wind that comes.

You were in my sleep
and in my dream you
were the wind
and your grip was good and cool
like a window behind rain.
After you came there was silence
my mind was empty again
when you touched me
and brought the dream
like lips to *my* lips.
To kiss a dream
is to kiss you
the dream shielding our kiss
from the wind
through the window

And when I strive to waken
my waking brings you
to reality
your grip and *you* the dream
part of my hands
my hair
that is raised by winds
waking.

Are you in my day?
Like you are in my night?
Are you in the stretch of my leg
the curve of my dreaming legs?
Or are you the sheet
I wind round my body
close when the wind is near
flung away as I wake
to a new day?

GLORIA KOMAI

Against Winter

Sun touches cheeks of peaches shaped to palms
Of summer; were red roses gathered, white
Butterflies could alight on perfume pressed
On the air's memory; nostalgia
Hankers like blue smoke after scarlet leaves.

Night turns towards you now; will turn away,
Tired out with stars; advance, withdrawal meet;
Wind cracks the crystal pool, cutting the moon's
Ripe quarter, golden skeletons of light:
Industriously hoards the squirrel heart.

PETER RUSSELL

Poem

My hopes like doves in the world's nets
are easily gone out;
Still the lanterns shine, still the great moths
Hover above the nicotinas in a garden that is gay.
Dreams are not more drowsy nor
The pale evenings' lightenings not more swift
Than love, or doves that never cease to come.

The doves come and my hopes like hands
Or birds' wings in Spring that must come home
Are swallows that will kiss the smooth waters' face.
Autumn is the day's end, tears
The swallow's way abroad or lover's evening.
As rooks to trees my velvet hopes will home.

My thoughts will like tall candles burn;
Their gutted ends will no disasters spell;
Soft as the human breast or lithe as limb
Fire is always or escaping only when
More fire or wings or hopes
Or love is waiting at the next Spring
To invade disasters we have borne,
Or doves in winter shot and tottering.

Elegy

Even as in summer, the thrush, even
As bones in the cavernous days
Or shells of Spring, as the mothers' love,
As the young faun's leaping fear,
Even as the road is long, even, uneven . . .

As the hart pants, as the fauns seek
Shade and the butterfly hesitates,
As the cuckoo mocks from the topmost twig
Where the sweet-apple hangs in the flower,
And the apple-gatherers' coming is sure . . .

As the crushing of corn, of apples, or grapes,
The crushing of lips, the trampling
Of wishes and kisses underfoot like fruit
Where Autumn waits with the Northern nymphs,
The burning of leaves and the season's agaric . . .

O Postumus, Kypria, we three have seen
The world's so frangible arrogance
And know its brief tears cannot prick
With pain of joy, or stab as a bird's song may
Or Autumn's forming bones in the April egg.

A. E. HANSEN

Reply to the Old Men

Reply to the old men
That each age is a forgetting,
Reply to the sere men
That they no longer listen
For change in the heart's discords,
In their miracle of end,
When leaves have shed their swords:
Cat stealth in the night,
Cry of bird in the innocent dark,
Has any age a word for all this quietness,
This leaf in the dark wind river.
They knew when breath first curved delight,
The flight of star and man,
The fall of light,
And when the cat sought prey in the sound of river,
They walked before chaos began,
With the mouse in their sight.

In the senses bewilderment
Runs the sound of river,
The sound of tree,
Which will ever be the same,
The holy and unholy name we seek for three
And secret times of age, must pass,
So shall our truth be folded up,
As cry of bird, beyond our sight,
Yet seeds an everlasting word
To leaf the old men's night.

S. STANLEY

College Life

This marks the atmosphere of all my days:
the skin-stripping eyes of custom in empty faces,
bleak daylight sweeping into airy-rooms,
a clock that is never set for the present, a knock
on someone else's dream:
shy sliding sounds of windows in the mist
waking more surely than the clap of doom,
the long-haired fury of the wind, the lamp
that casts deep shadow
meeter than moonlight for the blue-plumed night;
and the dark-dancing bars across my bed:

no other heaven but a barn; our quickening warmth
the meagre ration of our individual halo;
our hymn the rattle of corpse-keys and the shrill
trumpet and clarinet,
the chatter clatter of the red-eyed birds
on carrion bent, the words
that bounce in hollow mouths and pounce
into the clammy brain, draw out the heart
dripping to quiver on the gusted vane.

Looking through my own eyeballs I can see the little plants,
curled leaves laterally extended and busy digging roots,
exuding greenly into the yellow gloom
their blind exploring love; and at this time
the knife turns back in the hand, and draws a scarlet thread
across the throat
to parallel the ghastly smile above.

Season of poverty and penny-a-cup comfort,
bombard the grass with blossom burial.
Inside the skull
are the skull contents: within this brittle wall
I hold the world I live in: no more real
than a reflection on the naked steel; or else the dream
I had once long ago
of sunlight dancing in an empty room
and a single feather drifting on a sea of snow.

KENDRICK SMITHYMAN

Poem: Always the Stranger

Always the stranger hides in the curve
of love in the shade of the boughs and the leaves,
whose voice, singing, is sudden on our silence.

There where our great and human wanting
presses, there in the story told of our long hunting,
is the stranger abandoned from our innocence.

And we would both escape the lonely figure
whose voice sings in our silence and O bigger
whose shadow stands with hands that plead or threaten.

To pray is to wish for damage while bird in bush
whimpers and catcall traffic turns as we touch
urgent in moment person nor prayer may harden.

If through the screen of our words I press the sky
affirms the earth endures and the present pain of day
is a surgical exercise and natural and real.

So simple as bone or urgent as our reality
is the beggar voice singing that sometime we
made music of, private and unafraid then to feel.

Made music in childhood, token of passive temper
the fantasy brother, the lover who now example
stands in the shadow attending us like a stranger.

Who knows our yesterdays and certainly tomorrow
will strip the scar from the wound, unwind sorrow,
tell our tea-leaf fortune, explode our anger.

But will be what we separate, one and both,
stay deep in us and speak with our speaking mouth
who cannot cancel until re-entering a silence
admits, is lived in freed from our innocence.

EARLE BIRNEY

Montreal

I

This is New France, the oldest France alive,
where Church is more than State and less than stock-exchange,
where some men eat with taste and guiltless wine,
are courteous in streets and laugh with ease,
our only City and our largest slum.
Here poets own a press and print unread,
art bares the mammalled hills but not the bosom
and Butler's naked Greek is cloistered still.
For Hochelaga's palisades, the British wall in Westmount,
the isle within the isle, of language and illusion,
bifocal signs in streetcars, in politics and hearts,
défense de crâcher and *défense d'unifier*,
two roads to nationhood, to knowledge, and to Christ.

II

From the bark of the birch canoe
crawl trains like sepia centipedes
across a webbed St. Lawrence
while freighters leech the river's greying arms.
The dome of copper mushrooms from the hermitage
and painful as crippled ants the pilgrims
kneel up concrete flights to God.
But higher still above the climbing crosses,
above the convent and the lubberly college,
the oratory and the *Oratoire*,
shoot factories' cannon and the railroads' palaces.

III

Where the medicine man died of measles,
the pioneer of the arrow,
drive now the pale psychiatrist and priest.
Here Bretons uprooted the wigwam,
planted the manor and cabin,
reap weedy disorder of roof.
Swapped for the beaver and fox
washlines and rusty backstairs,
and a niche in the cage of St. James Street.
The Iroquois *auto-da-fé*,

the stocks in the Place d'Armes,
traded for pilloried wills and the brand in the brain
that stamps the whole world kin.

IV

The trapped Lachine treads out its life
to power Champlain's tinselled cross,
illuminate the lovers and the tycoon's Gothic.
The Huron scalp-lock and the powdered wig
dangle on museum walls,
the skiier prices manufactured *tocques*
and on St. Catherine's Street fedoras cover all.

V

What would we choose again, were we the choosers?
The carriole's wheel cutting the moccassin print,
or a ring of rust under the Cadillac's highway?
Trail and tree and raddled tepee
or precise décor of transformers?
The pinkcheeked *coureur de bois*
clutching swift death in the rapids,
or the seigneur's younger sons
placidly aged in the pulpmill?

From methane and the mind
a firewater is distilled
and drunken all we pay our *cens et rentes*
alike to foreign usurer or French;
the Norman conquers with *soutane* and *crêche*
an isle of sand between the global tides.

VI

And who has time to audit history's books,
the belching I's, the scarl t zero mouths
of ladies like sweet cockatoos on Sherbrooke,
the liquid integers *des concerts symphoniques*,
St. Henri's bleak arithmetic of wages, and the X,
the unknown quantity of faith against the sky?

MAY SARTON

Theme and Variations: Santa Fe, New Mexico

Meditation in Sunlight

In space of time I sit
Thousands of feet above
The sea and meditate
On solitude on love

Near all is brown and poor
Houses are made of earth
Sun opens every door
The city is a hearth

Far all is blue and strange
The sky looks down on snow
And meets the mountain-range
Where time is light not shadow

Time in the heart held still
Space as the household god
And joy instead of will
Knows love as solitude

Knows solitude as love
Knows time as light not shadow
Thousands of feet above
The sea where I am now.

Difficult Scene

This landscape does not speak,
Exists, is simply there,
Take it or leave it: the weak
Suffer from fierce air.

For these high desolate
Lands where earth is skeleton
Make no demands: they state.
Who can resist the stone?

Implacable tranquillity
That searches out the naked heart,
Touches the quick of anxiety
And breaks the world apart.

The angel in the flaming air
Is everywhere and no escape,
Asking of life that it be pure
And given as the austere landscape,

And most accompanied when alone;
Most sensitive when mastered sense;
Alive most when the will is gone;
Absence become the greatest Presence.

The golden landscape cannot save,
It only asks your right to be here:
Live, if you do not break the wave
Of time mounting the holy air.

The flaming angel does not show
The path to any near salvation:
Live, if the sun burning the snow
Suggests that passion is compassion.

The Window

Finite, exact, the square
Frames the long curve
Of hills and perpendicular
Spray of the delicate tree.
Wires, slanting, swerve
Off the flat scene;
And shining through
The mathematical window
The burning sky and the blue sun
Create a flowing fourth dimension:
The square explodes in space.

Then through the abstract window
Darkness comes down so deep,
The exact mountains show
Sleep in a flowing line,

Earth in a flowing sleep.
But suddenly alive,
The rivers of the air
Invade the static square:
As the stars only move
Obedient to Love,
Heart opens into time.

The square explodes in space,
The window opens into time
As poems breathe within their strict design,
As holiness may look out from a face.

JOSÉ GARCIA VILLA

Lo! my bright Lion

Lo! my bright Lion coming down!
Down Jacob's ladder he
My bright Lion coming down!

Whatever in you glows—
Whatever in you can praise—
(Rose or fruit or stone)—

To my bright Lion cast it now:
Look—in his mouth,
O look! in that clean mouth

How bravely carries he
—God the Dark Corpse
Out of Shining Heaven at last.

Veritable only is,
Indeed death only,
To suppose which
More truthful is

Than all truth is.
To be central or God-I
Came Jesus cross-high:
Unstrange at all

Everybody's clock
Ticks death's weather
To commemorate which
Tombs laud the last page.

God-I, natheless,
Autobiographize complete
Central on the first page.
Our tigric finality.

The Lamb and the Tiger
More truthful than,
Being One,
More death-sure then

Being unmen
More certain of
More final of
Certainly love.

A SELECTION OF RECENT AMERICAN POETRY

(Edited by COLEMAN ROSENBERGER)

KENNETH PATCHEN

THREE POEMS

'Beings So Hideous that the Air Weeps Blood'

Beings so hideous that the air weeps blood
And the forehead of God shrivels,
Advance toward us.
Smiling, they hand Mrs. Buell a tin pail
Of soldiers' livers and other modern delights.

Mrs. Buell looks hopefully at Alfred:
'Tell me, dear, what are we to do now?'
'Just sit tight until the soul plasma gets here.'

Lubby Stevers grins. He lifts his right leg
And squirts all over Christ.
'Here's one we haven't killed yet,' he exclaims
Happily. 'Let's pull his
You-know-what off first, though
'Oh, goodie, goodie,' cried Harry; it il make
Such a nice trinket for my Missus.'

Ah! a noble work is man . . .
Ah! a noble day for the Civilized Nations . . .

But I'd advise you to sit pretty tight
Until the soul plasma gets here.

'The Stars Go to Sleep So Peacefully'

The stars go to sleep so peacefully . . .
Their high gentle eyes closing like white flowers
In a child's dream of heaven.

With the morning, in house after grim house,
In a haste of money, proper to kiss their war,
These noble little fools awake.

O the soul of the world is dead . . .
Truth rots in a bloody ditch;
And love is impaled on a million bayonets.

But great God! the stars go to sleep so peacefully

Summer Day

You bring me Ocean Star a dreaming song
that shakes the bones of Apples
and makes a Church in this Snake's Head

—above the living—irrecoverably
a Bright Heart Goes Down—but every
Sign from Thee is Beautiful O I love

this weary little rain—
the sadness of knees—O are ye in love with
brown woods and the silver tink
of evening birds? (Immortal? why
yes! a thinking book on a white table.
O death must be this little girl
pushing her blue cart into the water.
O all Life must be this crowd of kids
watching a hummingbird fly around itself.)
And there is an Ear. And a Golden Heart.
And This Unclosing Eye

There is a man wading in the river . . .
A woman baking little cakes . . .
There is a village we will come to—
O there are arms for us!
A tree of remembering stars—
There is This Unkneeling Flame—

This sudden beautiful excitement—
O have ye buckets great enough
to catch so much Wonder in!

KARL SHAPIRO

An Urn of Ashes

I bring an urn of ashes for all those
Who come into the presence of love's death
To be unmarried and to curse the rose
That swore so beautifully to live the years.
What god is there with large eyes of dismay
Who broods over the death of marriages?

Alas, there is no god, but a bare judge,
The scholar of dry perjury who leafs
Through books of yellow buckram to discern
Old woes and precedents of woes.
This is the man who manumits our souls
And knows that laws are never to the rose.

Neither the god's priest, mealy-mouthed and suave,
Nor the sad god of divorce can really save
These people. Angrily opposed they stand
And put between them the slick table top.
They are like heirs assembled in a room
To hear the dreadful treatise of a will.

Until from the dry lips of the learned man
There falls a stale flat flower of the law,
Some old kiss pressed into a book of torts
That got there by a foolish sentiment.
This is awarded to the wife.
The husband is awarded a blunt knife.

Quite nervously he does what he is told
—To plunge the instrument into her life,
And that is all. They separate, they live,
At first in rooms with covered mirrors, then
In bright apartments where the newness hides
An urn of ashes and a broken name.

JOHN MALCOLM BRINNIN

Holiday of Sleep

Head over heels, hand over foot,
Headstrong I come to follow suit;
After the gift of Wednesday's cloth I got
A rack of chalk to swing my catching seed,
A croaking music whose immodest shadow
Means to abide me though I bid it go.
From ball and chain my orb and sceptre grow;
Witless, my bowstrings pluck harpsongs of sense
Arising overgreen but falling snow,
While trailing weeds of wailing seas, I go
By kilocycles of the god-eared shell
To face the fossil manscape and the end in view.
O flightless after that, my locked eyes look
On cliff-faced fathers, jaw-bones laced with grass!
And bye and bye while the red rains of faraway
Fall ever on my hunched and heavy home,
By rockfault gates I worm blind causeways through,
My branchings foliate, my roots too few.

At length my feathers fold;
Illusionless free-swimming eyes that held
Inscaping tents of fire, flower-fisted field,
Will on bald earth and bare board be cast down;
Laid to my loss too early, I have seen
Time's whistling curve coil toward that timelessness
Whose mysteries bleed these minor miseries.
Of two minds now, half by the wit
Of matchstick metaphysics and late candles lit,
Half by the titanic rays of the flown sun,
I stain this double world's rose-window;
By sun uplifted and by sun downfelled,
My blood in ultima Thule burns
For what this rattling fan of flesh, all yes,
Reflects with a handless passion yet cannot enfold.
Inadequately housed in halfway house,
My sleep's the metaphor and phœnix fire
Would bank the conscience of a guttering star.

HOWARD MOSS

Around the Fish: After Paul Klee

I

The mind from nature, divorced by love,
Stunned into being by the running wave,
Swims backward always. Around the fish,
Unreasoning sensation made a wish:
Parsley, persevering in a tree,
Maturely withers in the alchemy
Of elms and willows. So with us,
The elementary is most serious.

II

Wishing, the Fisher King sat down
(Bait was his body, but his catch, a crown!)
Incarnate fish food rose again,
Hooked to the level of his flawless line;
The sea stirred; sunlight's mica hurled
Aroma of the fish around the world;
Darwin breathed it on another shore,
Gasping the less than liquid air.

III

Swimmers, crying in the undertow,
A water blinds us where we go;
The whirlpool of the inner eye
Has wet ambitions, casts its fly
On sightless water; baited, fed,
Its fishing pole hangs by a thread.
But Christ lies on the blue plate, still.
The spawnless salmon strike to kill!

RANDALL JARRELL

The Place of Death

'The wreath is plaited wicker: the green varnish
Still traps, in its tarred pits, a race of gnats;
The flowers in the fruit-jar fail—and vanish,
Drying a stem for judgment. The outlandish
Angel fising a grey granite Bible
With his red granite eyeballs; the red squirrel that squats
In the black walnut with a wormy nut,
Gnawing mechanically: these, the red
And white and blue woodpecker hammering
This light-pole, are enough to wake the dead . . .
The living student walking with Spinoza
In his thin freckled hand, has sometimes felt,
Sinking upon a mound; the grassy airs,
The wood and meadow of their comprehension,
Have murmured to him, from the yellowing page,
That all determination is negation—
He has felt the boundaries of being fade,
These long-outmoded, mounded, dewy modes
Lapse to the seeding and inhuman Substance
Whose infinite, unchanging, and eternal thought
Is here extended in a thousand graves.
These shining bodies—vagrant as a flaw
Of the breath that in the made, dead flower, mourns—
Involved in their essences the little existence
That survives their thought of it; in part denied
But real, and hence perfect, they hunch here,
A realm within a realm, the last contrary
Being of all used, persisting things—
Till the avenging angel sheathe his sword,
Forget that he is guardian, and dream
(His pocked head pillowed on the book of Life)
The flower and the fruit-jar Victory,
And these graves serving an eternal God
That happiness itself, and final liberty
Which (from the delta of the Alp-born Rhine)
The dead Spinoza named necessity . . .
But the squirrel flames within the flaming wood
That soars above the poor mounds and their sigh:

'The pity that made us was not womanish',
But the gay bird hammers at the dying tree
Whose wires bring to the peoples light and death;
But the mourners gather for the dying gnat—
The dancers sparkling in their mating cloud—
And the sounds of the lens-grinder cease:
The mourners and the mourned are one. Once more
The great wind dances from the ends of Time
To breathe upon these leaves the student drops,
Napping an hour on this grassy grace.
But the angel whispers from the leafy tomb,
He is not here—see, see, he is not here;
But the leaves blow home to that inhuman kind
Who play their lives out in the place of death
And—dying, dying—from the unmourned grave
Cry to him: 'Only man is miserable'.

JOHN MALCOLM BRINNIN (b. 1916) is the author of three volumes of poetry—*The Lincoln Lyrics* (1942); *The Garden Is Political* (1942); and *No Arch, No Triumph* (1945). He teaches at Vassar.

RANDALL JARRELL (b. 1914) is the author of *Blood for a Stranger* (1942) and *Little Friend, Little Friend* (1945). He was a sergeant in the Army Air Force.

HOWARD MOSS (b. 1922) has contributed to a number of periodicals. His first book, *The Wound and the Weather*, will be published this winter.

KENNETH PATCHEN (b. 1911) was introduced to British readers in the Spring, 1946, issue of the POETRY QUARTERLY. His books include *Before the Brave* (1936), *First Will and Testament* (1939), *The Dark Kingdom* (1942), *The Teeth of the Lion* (1942), *Cloth of the Tempest* (1943); and in prose, *Journal of Albion Moonlight* (1941), *Memoirs of a Shy Pornographer* (1945), and *Sleepers Awake* (1946).

KARL SHAPIRO (b. 1913) is the author of *Person, Place and Thing* (1942), *V-Letter* (1944), and *Essay on Rime* (1945). He was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for poetry while serving in the army in the Pacific area.

DAVID GASCOYNE: POET OF CRISIS

At the bottom of everything,' wrote Bossuet, 'one finds inanity and a void'; and nothing more hostile to art's aspirations exists than this sense of futility.

To protect themselves against the doubt that our universe somehow lacks a meaning, poets have often been led to declare that they are solely concerned with beauty and not with any pursuit of truth. From this there springs the cult of form—a tacit wide conspiracy to limit art to the artificial and substitute a technical 'How' in place of an existential 'What'. Amongst the work of these worshippers of 'faking' the poetry of Gascoyne does not belong.

But 'what', wrote Benjamin Fondane, speaking of the artist's uneasiness confronted with the meaning of life and the world, 'what if the abyss did have something to say, something important, what if art were precisely its chosen language?' Well, at least in the case of Gascoyne it is; and no English poet since the early Eliot has filled his lines with the hollow music of 'the great inane' so expressively as he. To read his work is to register those images of contemporary *Angst*, of man's bewildered and anxious mind, homeless in this epoch of run-away history:

> *For all that eye can claim is impotent—*
> *Sky, solid brick of buildings, masks of flesh—*
> *Against the splintering of that screen which shields*
> *Man's puny consciousness from hell: over the edge*
> *Of a thin inch's fraction lie in wait for him*
> *Bottomless depths of roaring emptiness.*

In answer to the question put to him in 1934, 'As a poet what distinguishes you, do you think, from an ordinary man?' Gascoyne replied, 'Continual expectancy, which may at times become a state of hyperæsthesia'. And in this confession of apprehensiveness the essence of the poet's temperament is revealed. Thus inspiration, with him, becomes a quickening awareness of the unknown; a process half akin to dread.

Now poetry, one may say, is the knowledge of possibility, while history is limited to a knowledge of necessity. The first is free to conceive what *might be;* the second to represent what *was* and *is*. 'The poet is he who sees,' wrote André Gide, and in answer to his question, 'What does he see?' Gide replies, 'Paradise'. The answer might as well have been 'Purgatory,' for the greatest art is not an avoidance of the troubles which beset the life of man, but an elevation of those problems to a non-material imaginative level. In

an age such as ours—so fenced round with wrongs—this visionary diagnosis of the future will tend more and more towards an art of evil dreams and dark forebodings. It will act as the vent of our well-repressed fears, and constitute—as Gascoyne wrote of Patchen—'a guilt-determined *symptomatic reflection* counterbalancing our unpleasant "real world" and standing as . . . an indictment of it'.

'Just as the physician might say,' wrote Søren Kierkegaard—a philosopher whose work has much influenced the poet—'that there lives perhaps not one single man who is in perfect health, so one might say perhaps that there lives not one single man who after all is not to some extent in despair, in whose inmost parts there does not dwell a disquietude, a perturbation, a discord, an anxious dread of an unknown something, or of a something he does not even dare to make acquaintance with, dread of a possibility of life, or dread of himself, so that, after all, as physicians speak of a man going about with a disease in him, this man is going about and carrying a sickness of the spirit, which only rarely and in glimpses, by and with a dread which to him is inexplicable, gives evidence of its presence within.'

But if this despair in the minds of men for the most part manifests itself as a kind of occasional subconscious tremor—a stirring or vibration of inward *malaise*—there are, however, a few individuals in whom there dwells what Kierkegaard terms 'the Despair which is Conscious of being Despair'. These are the seers and prophet-artists; those whose condition of foresight and vision is—as Gascoyne has written of Hölderlin—'knowledge accompanied by damnation'. (Elsewhere, in the poem 'Inferno', he speaks of 'myself: my searcher and destroyer'.)

The poet is, then, a sort of scape-goat, a sensitive conductor and articulator of the unvoiced 'universality of despair'. Indeed, despair is viewed by Gascoyne as the sole starting-point of the truth, and non-despair as the hall-mark of the Philistine, the badge of Berdyaev's 'bourgeois of the spirit':

> *They who wait*
> *Without the great thirst of despair are cursed;*
> *And those who quench their thirst in death*
> *Shall fall asleep among the mirages.*

But what, the reader may ask at this point, is the source and cause of the despair whose eloquent channel for expression is the poet? In part, one may reply, it emanates from the very condition of human life: discrepancy between wish and fulfilment, the ache

of mortality, the pathos of death. Beyond the anguish of this sense of limitation and the grief derived from the transience of things—that 'lacrymæ rerum' of the pagan poets—there lies another burden on the spirit to-day. Ours is an age of finite vision, of material desires, and physical goals. Slowly but surely the vast diffusion and wide acceptance of the belief in historical determination has undermined the imaginative powers. Now to imagine is to hope; but hope is proved illogical for according to the Scripture of 'historical necessity' no event can escape the effects of its cause, nor be anything more than the sum of these effects. So understood, this concept of causation produces a sense of claustrophobia; and man becomes the prisoner of economic history, a predestined digit, a mind deprived of chance.

The despair originating from this rape of hope is well described by Kierkegaard. 'The loss of possibility,' he writes, in 'The Sickness unto Death', 'signifies: either that everything has become necessary to a man or that everything has become trivial. The determinist or the fatalist is in despair, and in despair he has lost his self, because for him everything is necessary. He is like that king who died of hunger because all his food was transformed into gold. Personality is a synthesis of possibility and necessity. The condition of its survival is therefore analogous to respiration, which is an in- and a-spiration. The self of the determinist cannot breathe, for it is impossible to breathe necessity alone, which taken pure and simple suffocates the human self.'

In a similar fashion, taking 'Spirit' to be awareness of possibility and 'Reason' the logic of necessity, Gascoyne writes of our disinfected hell: 'When Reason banishes the Spirit . . . Man immediately begins to lose his ancient sense of mission and of purpose on the earth. . . . For Man cannot endure for long the constant imminence of the aimless Void which is concomitant with denial of the Spirit'. This sense of nothingness, which Gascoyne calls 'the Void'—this vortex of vanity which drains our life of meaning—may be known or felt by us, but not represented; since a vacuum cannot be described, save in its own terms—by absence and silence.

Such, then, is the paradox of an art which quite deliberately sets out to create an idiom of the abyss—that mental zone of infinite negation. But this is to give pure formlessness a form; in other words, by transforming it, to triumph. 'The Void itself,' Gascoyne writes, 'cannot be apprehended except by means of symbolic expression. . . . By realizing such a term of reference we can free ourselves from the terrible non-existence implicit in the negation of the Spirit.'

To discover, then, an alphabet of negation, as Baudelaire sought for a language of ennui: such is the task which the poet attempts at the cost of his own peace of mind:

. . . The voice
Of prophecy destroys the speaker. Bleak
As a scraped bone, the stony tablelands
On which he stands. . . . He cannot kill
The serpent of the blood: but his ghost shall.
Though armies of his enemies extend
In coiling ranks around his feet, still yet
Shall he transcend defeat, if his great wound
Be kept from healing. . . . ARTIST! hold that host
Once more at bay by offering your flesh
As sacrifice to the Void's mouth in your own breast!

'The destructive element' of modern experience, which does not enrich but impoverishes our lives, which leaves us exhausted but unfulfilled, which eats away at our energies and aspirations like an acid: such was the theme of the early Eliot, and such is the subject of much of Gascoyne's verse. Sometimes the nature of this anæmic living is conveyed by means of allegoric landscapes, sometimes by psychological portraits, and sometimes by realistic scenes. To the first of these belong the poems 'Inferno', 'Winter Garden', 'To Benjamin Fondane', to the second, 'To a Contemporary', 'An Elegy', and 'Apologia'; and to the third, 'Noctambules', and 'A Wartime Dawn'.

Yet whatever the medium Gascoyne chooses a certain consistent atmosphere results. So, in painting a subjective *Weltschmerz* in the poem 'Ex Nihilo', he succeeds by means of a paradox—using 'black', the negation of colour, in a positive chromatic sense—and by packing into four well-weighted lines a maximum of alliteration, echo, chime, and internal rhyme:

Here am I now cast down
Beneath the black glare of a netherworld's
Dead suns, dust in my mouth, among
Dun tiers no tears refresh.

In a similar way, by an inventoried self-analysis of the poet's thoughts—each separate constituent particularized—he builds up a cumulative effect in his poem, 'From a Diary':

Imperfections of substance, dross of the day by day:
Banality, unlove and disappointment . . . Grey

Webs of attrition, and the trivial tick
Of the nerves' run-down clock, dank skeins of thick

Colourless thought unravelling through the skull,—
This bitter grit of conscience, and the dull

Pulse of internal scars . . . . Compression: no
Inscape or scope or space: only the flow
Of stupor's steady muffled fugue, etc.

Gascoyne appears, then, as a poet concerned with the study of disintegration, but guarding his own art carefully against the decay implicit in his theme. 'Guarding,' perhaps, may give a false impression; for in so far as the word suggests the artist holding himself aloof from the ravaging powers of experience we see that it does not apply in this case. Now art, we may say, has its origin in the exposure of sensibility to the assaults of phenomena—a Calvary of pleasant and unpleasant impressions. Beyond this, though, lies another step; and the poet, however distracted by sensation, must effect a synopsis of his encounter, organize his agitation, and consolidate his flux. Both these conditions Gascoyne fulfils, and his verse contains just that tremor of life compatible with the presence of form. Again, a qualification seems due, for this poet does not start to write with some *a priori* form in mind, but lets his experience dictate its own expression, aiding, abetting, and completing its growth. The structure of Gascoyne's poetry, then, presents us with the spectacle of *organic* rather than *constructed* form; but never with shapes of unmastered disorder.

But the cardinal element in Gascoyne's poetics is essentially the symbolic image; for like the surrealists (among whom he once numbered, writing, along with Francis Scarfe and Hugh Sykes Davies, the only poems of this movement in England which are still well worth reading to-day) he does not view the image as a figure of speech so much as a revelation of mind. In other words, he does not see it as a means to literary ornamentation, but rather as an instrument of intuition; a lift-shaft of vision, so to speak.

Like the surrealists, he also conceives *the advent of the image* as an uncoerced process; an offering or voluntary presentation from untapped levels of consciousness. 'It sometimes happens,' he writes, 'that one is given the power with which to extract a symbol from the incoherent welter of existence. The origin of this power is mysterious.'

Between the image and the symbol Gascoyne himself makes no distinction. 'It may be described,' he says of the latter, 'as reflection, precipitate, crystallization, image, talisman, and so on, according to the disposition of its creator, or of its beholder'. For purposes of criticism, however, some differentiation may with profit be employed.

When poets speak of 'song's eglantine', soft leaves 'breasted like a dove', a hollow cry of hounds likely lonely bells, they bring before us, by juxtaposition, one or two aspects only of their subjects. Thus we know about the song's mellifluity, the texture of the leaves, and the note of the hounds, but do not otherwise experience their nature. We only possess an attribute or aspect, an arbitrary fraction of the object which escapes us. The greater number of images belong, after all, to this partial kind. Yet when Gascoyne writes, in his poem 'Pieta', of

> *The Mother, whose dead Son's dear head*
> *Weighs like a precious blood-incrusted stone*
> *On her unfathomable breast. . . .*

we feel that in the middle line we grasp an image which totally defines. Not only are we given the visual appearance of the head of the crucified Christ, but the worth and significance of his death and its rare moral value are suggested by the image of the jewel. Again, in his poem 'A Wartime Dawn', where he writes of

> *. . . a moist-tinged blank*
> *Sky like the inside of a deaf-mute's mouth,*

more is described than the *look* of the scene; and a whole vague train of atmospheric likeness, with sinister undertones, is started in our minds. Such images, with their power of suggestion—concentrated compounds of comparison, compelling and original résumés—may well be distinguished as 'symbolic', and while ingenious and potent imagery—of a direct and simple kind—is a property of all healthy verse, it is only poetry of a somewhat higher order in which the symbolic image is found.

Haunted by the spectre of the meaningless—the annihilating unreality of modern societies organized, neither for happiness nor good, but solely as vast mass-incubators of further money and further power—the poet's own sanity is damaged and the thick skin of natural well-being is torn:

> *But who has lived an hour*
> *In the condemned condition of our blood*

And not known how a wound like a black flower,
Exquisite and irreparable, can break
Apart in the immortal in us. . . .

Through this psychological lesion a momentary kind of communication is established with the deeper stratas of being, and from these depths the symbolic image mounts like a new planet in the skies of the mind. Habit and familiarity, for the most part, produce an allergic condition, preventing the greater number of us from fully registering the effects of the disease of contemporary life. With Gascoyne, poetically, the reverse has occurred. Exposure has resulted in greater sensitivity; in a greater tattooing of the nerves by pain. It is thus that he has become a poet of continual crisis, of that total state of emergency which now seems to be accepted as the human norm.

This apprehensive state of near-perdition which Gascoyne so well conveys has something in common with Karl Barth's 'theology of crisis': the same sense of some momentous issue pressing for responsible recognition. It is also strengthened by the poet's earlier adherence to the ideas of Marx, interpreted in a somewhat personal fashion. Both in material and spiritual matters, he feels the imminence of some great catastrophe: in the first, the downfall of capitalism; in the second, the shipwreck of man's hypocritical heart. From this arises the poet's despair; but despair may be dialectical, may contain within it the germ of re-birth. 'Despair is winged,' writes Pierre Jean Jouve:

Despair is winged
Despair can fly
On love's white wings
Societies change.

So Gascoyne strains himself to discover that 'desperate grace' resulting from 'the revelation of despair'.

This revelation, in turn, becomes faith; and here it seems that what reassures the man hinders and all-but extinguishes the poet. Thus it is that while Gascoyne wrestles in imaginative fear and guilt and doubt, he produces the fine tense poetry in the 'Miserere' section of his book.* Once, however, this battle is resolved, once the light of certitude dawns in his mind, the anguish acting as motive power is removed or dispersed, and his verse is diminished. Unlike the greatest English mystic poets, Gascoyne seems unable

* *Poems* 1937–42 (PL Editions).

to express the positive aspect of his faith, and can only hint at its existence by his awful awareness of its negation:

And may we know Thy perfect darkness.
And may we into Hell descend with Thee.

The exhausting reality of disbelief, and the mind's repulsion in face of it: this is what Gascoyne has so vividly portrayed—a mystical poetry of pre-conversion.

In the religious amelioration of his sense of anxiety, Gascoyne would therefore seem to have lost that psychological irritant, which, in the poet, produces verse as grit in the oyster creates a pearl. It may, of course, be that though he now exists in a region of conviction intellectually speaking, his temperament and constitution are still of too nervous and highly-strung a nature ever to let his mind sink back on the comfortable cushions of untroubled faith.

For five years now* he has published little save some fine occasional translations from the poetry of Pierre Jean Jouve and one or two philosophical notes. In the last of these—writing from the Christian standpoint, he speaks of Sartre's atheism as a form of 'philosophical procrastination' of which he naturally disapproves. For the Christian mind there is only one choice: the decision of accepting or rejecting Christ. For the Existentialist of Sartre's school no choice can ever be the final one; a new decision is demanded every day. For all its logical *non-sequiturs* the Existentialism of Sartre does at least encourage a state of mind in which the uniqueness of art's approach to each problem of living is emphasised. There is, it might say, no over-all or totalitarian concept of art: there are only its myriad individual works. Art is the form or expression of a choice, and choice must be made again and again.

That this æsthetic of the renewal of question and answer without end would seem to have been ideally suited to Gascoyne's susceptible light-triggered mind—to his sense of 'continual expectancy'—we may observe as a paradox. Whether the faith he appears to have embraced can assist him as a poet we must yet wait to see.

DEREK STANFORD

* Although published in 1943, *Poems* 1937–42 contained no pieces dated later than 1941.

REVIEWS

The Complete Nonsense of Edward Lear, edited by HOLBROOK JACKSON (Faber & Faber, 12s. 6d.). *Robert Burns*, edited by WILLIAM MONTGOMERIE (Maclellan, 6s.); J. REDWOOD ANDERSON, *Paris Symphony* (Harrap, 6s.); ALEC CRAIG, *The Voice of Merlin* (Fortune Press, 7s. 6d.); GEORGE SIMS, *The Immanent Goddess* (Fortune Press, 5s.); WALTER ROBERTS, *The Nutshell* (Matson's Publications, n.p.).

To read Edward Lear's *Nonsense* continuously for several hours, even if one has had little or no knowledge of it before, is an experience as stunning and mirthless and nightmarish as a similar length of time spent in a gallery of distorting mirrors would be. The absence of surprise in the last lines of his endless number of limericks has an effect as infuriating as that of hearing scales played without the top-note, and his monkeying with words, his extravagant puns and hooting spoonerisms prove how right Miss Sitwell was when she proclaimed her gratitude for lacking a sense of humour.

And yet, after one has long forgotten that the books which Mr. Holbrook Jackson has painstakingly collected within one—most beautifully produced—volume have been 'eaten up' by the same generations of children which were fascinated by 'Alice' and 'Struwelpeter,' there still remains a feeling of admiration for their author, and of pity with him for the terrors which beset his mind and from which he sought relief by making up rhymes about old men whose noses were so long they reached to their toes, whose form was spherical or uncommonly thin, whose visage was perfectly hideous, who wished they had never been born, and who were all Edward Lear.

He was the youngest of twenty-one children; his father had been a stockbroker who finished up in the King's Bench prison. He spent his life working furiously as a topographical painter, travelling restlessly across Europe and Egypt and India. 'We have no evidence,' as Mr. Holbrook Jackson put it in his informative introduction, 'that he was attracted by women except as friends, and his works . . . are as sexless as the artistic efforts of a child'. He was lonely, for all the many 'swells' who befriended or patronized him, in ill-health and fear of epileptic fits, and constantly irritated by the uncertainty of his income; yet always, in spite of the 'four hundred and seventy-three cats at least . . . all at once making an infernal row in the

garden' and 'the row of forty little ill-conducted beasts' of children in a Swiss hotel, his boyishness, his 'peterpantheism' stayed with him, and so did his cat Foss. For it was himself, his sense of frustration and his neuroses and complexes that he held up to ridicule in his *Nonsense* verses.

To-day the overpowering whimsy of his quips and puns and the pointlessness of his limericks and alphabets are hardly amusing beyond a certain age. But his admirable drawings, the romance of 'The Owl and the Pussy-cat', and the gloss and exuberant fantasy of 'The Jumblies' and 'The New Vestments' continue to delight because of their technical perfection.

Edwin Miur, in an excellently concise essay which introduces a volume of 'new judgments' of Robert Burns, has attempted to investigate what has caused Burns to be 'so deeply imbedded in Scottish life that he cannot be detached from it', and promptly supplied the answer: *he became legendary because he was so uniquely ordinary*. To the non-Scot in Scotland it is a strange experience suddenly to have endless quotations and analyses rained upon him in the unlikeliest places and by the unlikeliest persons, and he is liable to conclude that he is dealing with a peculiarly poetical people, until it occurs to him to question why the quotations have frequently been of the quality of:

The hert's aye the pairt aye
That maks us richt or wrang,

and too rarely like:

O that the grave it were my bed;
My blankets were my winding sheet;
The clocks and the worms my bedfellows a';
And O sae sound as I should sleep

—that is, why they should echo the Rabbie of Burns' Nicht who uttered his great platitudes, rather than the poet. The answer, as Mr. Miur points out, is that to every Scot he is a comforting, a necessary figure, the man of the people who knew the people's idiom and sentiments, whether he sang ballads in their splendid tradition or shouted that:

The kirk and state may gae to hell
And I'll gae to my Anna.

It is his hatred of hypocrisy, his defiant attacks on 'politicians, Kirkmen, the unco' guid and pompous busy-bodies,' which has

given to all of them that feeling of kinship with him, similar to the Austrians' one-time affection for Nestroy.

The present volume is of considerable interest, for apart from Mr. Miur's contribution it contains several valuable essays, notably that of the editor.

Lack of space does not allow more than a note on the remaining four books. Mr. Redwood Anderson's *Symphony* deals, as a symphony should, with Everything in Capitals. Undoubtedly a great deal of care and thought went into its making, equally undoubtedly it is very flat and stale. In his poem on the Arthurian legend, Mr. Craig's noble intentions were overwhelmed by his inability to sustain the grand manner which he thought it necessary to adopt. If the poem is read aloud, as it was probably intended to be, some of its long passages of florid sentimentality may not seem quite so jarring. A first collection by George Sims contains, apart from some good epigrams, much mannered, cacophonic writing (*a summer, idler wind shakes tractor's fine blue breath*), where even the continuous omission of articles does not turn banalities into poetry. Finally, Mr. Walter Roberts' invitation to subscribe to a series of twelve booklets, all in blank verse with interludes of rhymed metres, similar in length and price to the present one, must be speedily declined by this reader.

ERNST SIGLER

A HARD, DRY LIGHT

BERNARD SPENCER, *Ægean Islands* (Nicholson & Watson, 6s.).

The northern nations, on the periphery of European civilization, are continually drawn to the Mediterranean countries, where, amid the relics which mark the origins of our culture, life still moves with a more primitive intensity, and thought and passion alike burn clearer, quicker and brighter. On the imagery of English poets, in particular, the hard dry light of the Mediterranean has a strengthening and clarifying effect. In the last century Landor, Byron, Shelley and Browning were all drawn to Italy. In our own time it seems as if the area of Mediterranean culture to which English poets have been attracted has shifted further eastwards, to include Greece and the Middle East. At all events, those poets who found themselves in Cairo through the circumstances of the late war seem to have come near to forming a distinct school of their own, and to be ready to admit that this apparent accident of location had a decisive effect upon the development of their style. Lawrence Durrel, who has

chosen to make his home on Corfu, Terence Tiller, whose employment took him to Egypt, and Bernard Spencer, who knows the Ægena Islands from which his volume of poems takes its title, since, before the war, exemplify this same phenomenon.

Bernard Spencer is, in fact, a really admirable poet of his own special kind. He represents the best side of the tradition which, before the war, was fostered by *New Verse*. His poems are clear-cut, precise, and metrically free without being loose. They are notes of experience induced in an intelligent, detached observer. Their principal fault is a tendency to confuse mere observation with poetry, to substitute the 'camera eye' for imaginative vision. In the poems written before 1940, which record the English industrial scene, the left-ish social-political ideology strikes one as being rather due to the contemporary literary convention than to individual passion. And when he considers the ancient cultures of the Mediterranean, he comes as an archæologist, not as one who can participate in continuity. He is without any sense of roots:

> *Peering for coin or confident bust*
> *Or vase in bloom with the swiftness of horses,*
> *My mind was never turned the way*
> *Of the classic of the just and the unjust.*
> *I was looking for things which have a date,*
> *And less of the earth's weight,*
> *When I broke this crust.*

Bernard Spencer is, indeed, a poet who deals with no more than the surface of life. But in poem after poem, within his limitations, he achieves a real perfection of style. That is no mean thing, and should be sufficient to lend an enduring quality to his work.

JOHN HEATH-STUBBS

HENRY TREECE, *The Haunted Garden* (Faber, 7s. 6d.); *Contemporary Chinese Poetry* (Routledge, 10s. 6d.).

Even if I did not personally derive satisfaction from Treece's poetry, I should re-read it on the ground that worthless poetry does not evoke violent personal abuse. For a writer to be a standing target for a particular school of criticism he must have *some* stature: the aim of the classicist critics is not good enough for them to try sniping straws. Treece's inequality is a fact which is obvious to everyone, including himself, and that inequality, combined with his tendency to write theoretical expositions of what he is doing, has canalized some people's distaste, but he cannot be

disposed of either by rude noises or by the fact that he parodies himself very easily. If we do not accept either his own or Mr. Grigson's estimate of his work we ought to try to find a basis on which it can be criticized.

Treece is a rhetorical, but not a spontaneous, writer. His rhetoric arises from his theoretical ideas rather than from his own impulses and background. He is extremely easily led to adopt his own cast-off clothes and parade as a kind of Guy Fawkes effigy of himself. Words obsess him, and he seems to think in gestures or gesticulations rather than images. On the other hand, he has a scope in those gesticulations which is so much wider than that of the precision-tool-fitters that he is capable of constructing the Sydney Harbour Bridge while they are considerably extended in making a miniature deaf-aid. If his architecture sometimes produces the Eiffel Tower or the Great Wheel of Blackpool, one is perfectly entitled to draw attention to his best work and leave it at that. The success of his earliest work does not seem to me to lie in the Treecian apparatus of lads, princes, knives and so on, but in his genuine success in resuscitating the Spenserian line, his vitality, and his fundamentally serious approach to poetry. It is not true that all the worst poets are serious. Treece has sometimes the wrong kind of seriousness, but most of the time it is the right kind. If his failings are similar to those of Webster, so are his successes. He lacks Dylan Thomas's spontaneity, but in his best writing, *A Personal Armageddon* in particular, he is a more accomplished craftsman. The texture and feel of this poem is able to convince even where the language is under strain. It is this strain in single words, often unessential adjectives, which makes both the texture and tapestry-effect and the melodramatic timbre.

If *A Personal Armageddon* were the whole of Treece, he would be another of the writers who have stuck, at the level of the virtues and faults of their earliest work. The present book shows a bewildering mixture of styles, but except in a few pieces which are self-parodies, the whole of the earlier material has been abandoned. The new style which Treece is making for himself seems to me to have wider possibilities of merit and fewer drawbacks than that of *Armageddon*, which, while it was outstanding, was precarious in its effectiveness—an outstanding poem which left a feeling that if it were to be repeated in later work it would be bad. The new style is far closer to Edward Thomas than to Webster-Dylan Thomas. Between the two lie the self-parodies, the tentative poems, and a number of pieces at whose authorship one might guess

wildly—poems of this type usually indicate a conscious search for another manner: one finds them in the middle Yeats and the middle Eliot. They represent a phase which someone described as 'getting charged-up again'.

By sundown we came to a hidden village
Where all the air was still
And no sound met our tired ears, save
for the sorry drip of rain from blackened trees
And the melancholy song of blackened gates. . . .

No-one had told us victory was like this;
Not one amongst us would have eaten bread
Before he'd filled the mouth of the grey child
That sprawled stiff as a stone before the shattered door
There was not one who did not think of home.

It is almost incredible that this is the same writer. The dead child and the starved dog used to be symbols. They were decorative rather than alarming. What has happened is less that Treece has modified his symbolic imagery to the real world than that the real world has become as melodramatic, as decorative, as full of diabolical mystifications as the early Treece. The Air Force poems are less successful, because any writer whose style is at all influenced by rhetoric finds himself in competition with the *Sunday Times* barkers —the Irish sequence is a striking indication of what Treece has assimilated from F. R. Higgins, though no Irishman would see Dublin as he does: the curious character of Dublin is that almost everyone feels he has lived there all his life.

I have moved far from the image of another
Who once walked with me, sharing one shadow;
And I have reached the prize of my own rough shroud,
Out of another's decay to my own rightful death,
And the ecstatic freedom of a personal end
Shared now with no-one and which none shall ever share.

Somebody should read this to the authors of the Ern Malley poems, which were supposed to be a parody of Treece. If they ever read any of his early poems (which I doubt, since they might parody easily, but bear about as much resemblance to Ern Malley as they do to Whittaker's Almanac) they might attribute this to somebody like Jouve or Herbert Read and refuse to believe Treece wrote it.

It is this second style which seems to me the most important feature of the new book. The tapestry-figures of the earlier Apoca-

lyptic work have become rounded and have fitted into a pattern of poetic vision as self-critical and definite as the earlier manner was demonstrative and violent. Quite clearly, not all the tentative poems will survive, but the excellence of the two pieces I have quoted is sufficient in itself to show that Treece's poetry, so far from being stationary, is developing into a more adult and accomplished form with his increasing control over it. They do not diminish the merit of *Armageddon*, but they add to Treece's range of poetic achievement, and I do not think that the critics who regard him with most personal malice will find it convenient to quote them.

In the Chinese book the barrier of translation is impenetrable. While it is of great interest, it is hopeless to say anything about the merit of the work. The war-songs read like Vachell Lindsay, but it is plain that the whole impact is dulled and flattened in the transition to English, and the entire book might be by one writer. This imposed flatness creates or intensifies a rather dignified beauty in many of them, but the product does not read like a poem, only like the framework of a poem. This is unfortunate, because it is clearly not the fault of the translators, and one would like to know more of the work than it is possible to find out. The lives and activities of the poets interested me more—they show what kind of people are writing in China to-day.

ALEX COMFORT

LOUIS MACNEICE, *The Dark Tower* (Faber & Faber, 8s. 6d.); KARL SHAPIRO, *Essay on Rime* (Secker & Warburg, 6s.); R. C. TREVELYAN, *From the Shiffolds* (Hogarth Press, 5s.).

Mr. MacNeice's radio-plays are entertaining, but they are not very good. He displays in his General and other Introductions a regard for them which they do not seem to merit. The best are the March Hare plays which are pleasantly and crazily satirical in a sort of Hellzapoppin way, but with a little more intellectual point. These, he tells us, do not go down well with the audience. *The Dark Tower*, a parable play as he calls it, is a bit of mystification based on Browning's poem, 'Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came', and it is, in miniature, a very much denuded version of 'The Ascent of F6', though, of course, the setting is different. And it also seems to owe a little to Saroyan's play-version of 'My Heart's in the Highlands' in its emphasis on trumpeting for its own sake. 'I have my beliefs and they permeate *The Dark Tower*,' writes Mr. MacNeice, 'for the benefit of people like the *Daily Worker's* radio critic'. This may be so, but all that

emerges from the play is something very vague, romantic and incoherent—a sort of perpetual and hopeless nostalgia. 'The Nose-bag,' a dramatized version of a Russian folk story, is better. But it is a good story. 'Sunbeams in His Hat' is 'a study of Tchehov as a man'. It is a synthetic production (what the B.B.C. calls a feature), but a competent one. But, as in his poems, Mr. MacNeice is best when he deliberately sets out to be entertaining (The 'March Hare,' 'Bagpipe Music'); when he sets out to be serious he is moody and evasive or, if it is a synthetic concoction, insincere, and his work suffers.

Mr. Shapiro as a writer is somewhat akin to Mr. MacNeice, but he doesn't play the fool so much, and is proportionately less successful. Moreover, his competence is less, and the synthetic elements in his work are greater. Mr. MacNeice's borrowings are mostly in the realm of ideas; he is not an original thinker; and where he thinks most he succeeds least. Mr. Shapiro thinks more, but no better, and his borrowings are mostly in the realm of technique. His shorter poems are mostly a sort of jackdaw's assortment of bits and pieces from all popular modern styles; at their best they are superficially well-dressed-up in a fairly tight technique modelled on Allen Tate's: at their worst they are all falling to pieces. In his *Essay on Rime* he attempts an ambitious project and fails dismally. His trouncing of the theory and practice of poetics among his contemporaries merely serves to show the poverty of his own thought and the shoddiness of his technique. As an essay on poetics the book is poor: as a piece of verse it is execrable. There are, of course, occasional incidental compensations, but it would be difficult for a knowledgeable person to write a book on poetics without achieving a few insights, or to write so many lines of blank verse without a few incidental felicities. There are not enough. Mr. Shapiro's 'bold experiment' is a *tour de force* all right, but it's jerry-built.

Both Mr. MacNeice and Mr. Shapiro are loquacious poets of boundless ambition. But neither have minds of sufficient quality to create anything which isn't more or less synthetic; Mr. MacNeice entertains at times because he has some wit, but both are essentially bores. 'Belief,' writes Mr. MacNeice, 'still remains a *sine qua non* of the creative writer'. But that is not good enough. It is the quality and nature of the beliefs that matter. A writer may have any of many different beliefs; what is important is not so much what he believes as the quality of his belief, as shown in his attitude to it, and the use to which he puts it in his writing. Many would-be writers may share the same beliefs and the same knowledge of technique, but the good writer will be distinguished by the nature and quality

of his belief—whatever it may be—not what he believes, but how he believes. It is not good for a writer to have too many doubts; nor is it good for him to have none.

Mr. Trevelyan is a wise writer, and his poems are, in their small way, excellent. He loves his classics, and his poems might be called synthetic in that they are composed very much in the manner of the classical authors he admires. But here the synthesis is genuine and inoffensive. He is not merely collecting other people's properties and rehashing them as his own. He has a genuine eye for things, and, though he writes in the manner of the models he admires, he has his own observations to make. Writing in a style that pleases you is a very different proposition to taking over another person's tricks and manners lock, stock and barrel. How admirable is his short poem on failing to understand modern poetry compared to Mr. Shapiro's laborious and patronizing essay! Similarly most of his poems, ascetic and scholarly as they may be, are admirably true to life and suited to the mode in which they are written. His translations, too, from Menander and the Greek anthology, are excellent, and he even succeeds partially in translating two poems of Catullus that are remarkably difficult to render successfully in English. *From the Shiffolds* is not an ambitious book or a great book, but it is very enjoyable. Mr. Trevelyan knows what he believes; and he makes good use of what skill he has.

NICHOLAS MOORE

PORTRAIT OF A HITCH-HIKER

Mere England, a poem by J. H. B. PEEL (Chaterson, 7s. 6d.).

Confronted with (Mr. Eliot will, I hope, forgive the borrowing) this and so much more, one might perhaps be inclined to put Mr. Peel's epic aside with some mutter of 'what more can I say'. With this one book of verse Mr. Peel has apparently managed to sway all his reviewers to praise, and such spongy praise at that. Readers of POETRY QUARTERLY might well ask who is this Mr. Peel, whose verse holds such eclectic qualities to appeal so rabidly to Mr. Church, Mr. Braddock, Mr. Lynd, Mr. Brooks, Mr. Trewin, and their confreres.

Mere England, a poem of the twelve calendar months, some 220 pages of verse, verse, verse, verse . . . it is quite staggering; one is almost tempted to applaud Mr. Peel's endurance.

The idea is not new, but that is hardly a criticism; many have worked their way through the seasons with equal vigour, and Mr.

Peel has paid homage to his forebears in this matter in no uncertain terms. One can, with time to spare, play a rather interesting if elementary game of checkmate with *Mere England*, finding as one does so many paraphrases of work by all those who have sung England's praise. Again, one should not be unduly harsh when one recalls that 220 pages must be filled with print.

From Mr. Peel the anthologist let us turn to Mr. Peel, pure and unadulterated: good measure is to be found. In January, Mr. Peel from his Chiltern country sees 'the world in miniature'; all can be found on Bledlow Ridge. He 'toils', he 'bears', he 'devours', he is 'aware of hills', he is 'harmonized with living' (a 'little giddied' now and then). In February when the 'babe new born' is 'whimpering from the womb,' Mr. Peel is taught that 'men like seasons change as they mature'. March bubbles in for him 'wearing flowers a-bloom', and such signs provoke Mr. Peel to command his soul to kneel. April, 'her girlish wiles' most evident brings him the cuckoo and the song of that month so 'timid, tentative and tender', and lead Mr. Peel to all kinds of metaphysical meandering. May 'most deftly poised twixt age and adolescence', fills Mr. Peel with 'delicious torment', and he adds his 'little song'. In June, but really not even for POETRY QUARTERLY readers can I trudge through all the months along with Mr. Peel and his coy wonder at the change of sky.He goes on and on remorselessly until he reaches the old and weary earth of December, when having lumbered so far he expresses his hope that his 'loving labour shall profit one man at least' and 'bring him hope and courage and delight'.

Mr. Peel reminds me only too forcibly of the well-intentioned but clumsy moving hitch-hiker who plants his two feet most heavily on every plot of earth he passes over, who pulls up bluebells to demonstrate that they are indeed bluebells, who will prove that a buttercup is a buttercup, and that snow often falls in the winter and that apples ripen and birds do sing. There is little Mr. Peel leaves alone; perhaps this tireless energy, this desire to prove that white is white and black is black, is the reason why those 220 pages of *Mere England* drew such laudatory laments—confronted with so much excess one is often tempted to say 'it's wonderful, wonderful,' and stalk away.

After a dose of *Mere England* and Mr. Peel I

. . . had rather live
With cheese and garlic in a windmill, far,
Than feed on cakes and have him talk to me
In any summer-house in Christendom.

EDWARD LANE

AGNES GROZIER HERBERTSON, *Here Is My Signature* (Hutchinson, 6s.); ELEANOR FARJEON, *First and Second Love* (Michael Joseph, 5s.); GEORGE VILLIERS, *Poems* (The Harvill Press, 8s. 6d.); WILFRID GIBSON, *Coldknuckles* (Frederick Muller, 7s. 6d.).

The first three books under review have in common a lack of inventiveness and banal imagery.

The brand on the cover of Miss Herbertson's book, marking her as one of the winners of the Hutchinson 10,000 United Nations Literary Competition stigmatizes her forts. If one cannot expect genius one hopes for talent, if not maturity then promise, if not discipline at least restraint. One is disappointed. We are told that her sense of beauty and power of intuition are so strong that she has no need to employ verbal tricks to gain effect. But a little more care in her choice of words might have prevented the composition of such lines as 'The time I slept in the hollow/I heard the daffodils laughing'—to mention only one of the many shockers. She is most successful when writing in ballad form. 'The Ballad of the Sorrowful Fisherman' is spirited, and perceptive in 'The Gipsy Rests'.

The volume by Miss Farjeon contains sonnets written between the years 1911-1917. They are young and touching and sincere, and occasionally have a raw and timid sort of poetry:

> *I have seen apparitions. I have heard*
> *Rumours within my soul's profoundest cave.*
> *Movements remote and mighty have been stirred*
> *In my ancestral blood, while from the grave*
> *And womb of time strange thunders did arise*
> *Which shook the throne of thought with prophesies.*

The last three sonnets in the collection have a roughness of texture and urgency of sentiment that make them strangely appealing.

George Villiers wrote in the years following the 1914-1918 war. They are eager expressions of delight in the songs of birds, the 'creamy meadows sweet', the green-lit lawns and sloping orchards. All natural life looks good to one who has survived the devastation of those infernal battles. But they are so breathless with relief that the voice of discrimination is heard only as an occasional whisper. Like the nobleman in the Forest of Arden, he finds good in everything, and the glory of God is poured out over all the lands of the earth. Here and there are lines which one re-reads and remembers:

. . . the praise
Of elemental and stupendous things,
Dooms and decrees and splendours of dead kings.

By contrast Wilfrid Gibson's *Coldknuckles* is packed with invention and with crisp images. It is the story of young Isaac Bell, the bastard son of a lion tamer, of how he found his father and joined the circus, of how he rescued his sweetheart from a gruesome life and became involved in murder. The setting is Northumberland, a place of naked moorland and burns rushing 'rain-swollen through dank fern'. It is told in racy, descriptive language:

Then all at once the foggy air
Was ripped with ellerish yells and wails;
And boggles out of old wives tales . . .
Brag, horney, hobthrush, wirrikow . . .
Were flaffering all about him now.

PATRICIA LEDWARD

English Sonnets, edited with an Introduction by WALT TAYLOR (Longmans, Green & Co., 8s. 6d.); JAMES TURNER, *The Hollow Vale* (Cambridge University Press, 3s. 6d.).

Mr. Taylor has set up as rival to the three twentieth-century experts on the English sonnet—Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, T. W. H. Crosland (no relation of mine) and Miss Enid Hamer. He spares the reader and the School Certificate swot (for which latter the book will be very useful) from too much theorizing, and gives a brief history of the form which has been described as the corner-stone of English poetry, albeit an imported one. He realizes that a rigid adherence to the classical forms would stifle any further development and permits the assonantal and unrimed sonnet; however lovely the 'Curtal-sonnets' of Hopkins, I cannot agree all the same to the inclusion of 'Pied Beauty' in a collection of this type. If anything, there is too much in this book—certainly too much Shakespeare, and it was a mistake to perpetuate some of Keats' sentimental efforts such as 'Blue!' 'Tis the life of heaven,—the domain Of Cynthia,' etc. The great joy is the discovery of old favourites or new curiosities, such as 'When I behold thee, blameless Williamson,' by Benjamin Stillingfleet, or 'On a wet summer,' by John Codrington Bampfylde, which should be better known. There is that delightful triptych by Leigh Hunt, 'The Fish,

the Man, and the Spirit to a Fish,' and surprisingly but topically enough Rossetti 'On Refusal of Aid Between Nations'. William Plomer and Roy Campbell represent the moderns and take the final curtain.

On the way through the hollow vale of this dreamof humanity. Turner makes us intensely aware of the still sad music -journey Mr. There is something of the mood of 'Samson Agonistes' but without the magnificent serenity of the ending, and without the arresting imagery. When I am sixty I shall re-read 'All Passion Spent'; then I shall take up *The Hollow Vale* and browse slowly through it, as the sun sets beyond the garden. It will no doubt seem more moving then than at the present, when it is hard to say with conviction—

in the clouds I saw God
Heard the colour of His speech,
Its golden liquidity, and with my fingers
Did I touch the dulcet sounds
Of all His radiance.

MARGARET CROSSLAND

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